W H S WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS W H S

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The University Musical Society
by Charles A. Sink, President

This year the University Musical Society is observing its Diamond Jubilee. It was organized during the season of 1879-1880. It is necessary to go back, however, twenty-five years before that to find the germ of Ann Arbor's musical life planted in and about the University.

1854 First Beginnings In 1854, the infant University brought to Ann Arbor as Head of the Department of Latin Language and Literature, a very cultured and distinguished gentleman from the East,- Henry Simmons Frieze. Although a young man, Mr. Frieze was a distinguished scholar, not only in his own field, but in related fields. He was also an accomplished amateur musician. For 25 years he was the "spark plug" of Ann Arbor's musical life. He served as organist and choir director in several of Ann Arbor's churches. He often induced musicians from the East and elsewhere to stop off for some sort of musical performance in connection with his church activities. On such occasions he would invite music lovers to his home for a musical evening. He lived in the old stone house at 1547 Washtenaw Avenue near the intersection of Hill Street, which he had built in 1858-59. He is said to have been his own architect. Matters musical went on pretty much in this way until the fall of 1879, 25 years after his arrival in Ann Arbor. That season several circumstances arose which later had an important bearing upon the future of music in the city and the University.

1879 Churches sing Messiah A group of choir members in four of Ann Arbor's churches - Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal - conceived the idea of uniting in singing choruses from Handel's "Messiah." They planned musical evenings in these churches in association with the respective women's societies. The first concert took place in the Congregational Church, the second in the Methodist Church, and for the third concert the Episcopalians and Presbyterians united for a performance in the Presbyterian Church. These concerts usually had more singers than there were people in the audience. Business meetings followed, and refreshments were served by the ladies.

1880 Choral Union This group shortly decided to include other choral numbers and to increase their repertoire. They also voted to extend their membership outside the realm of the four churches; and the organization became known as the "Choral Union." Mr. Frieze, of course was an important factor in directing this policy.

1881 Ann Arbor School of Music

About the same time, a cultured musician, Calvin O. Cady, a graduate of Oberlin College, came to Ann Arbor to teach music, at a salary of $800 per year. Professor Frieze immediately took him in hand and gave him great encouragement. Cady associated himself with several other musicians and opened a studio known as "The Ann Arbor School of Music." He desired to incorporate his institution, but there were legal difficulties. Professor Frieze then suggested that both the Choral Union and the School of Music should become divisions of the University Musical Society, which had been organized in 1880 for the purpose of bridging the gap between community music and University music.

1881 University Musical Society

This Society was made up of distinguished members of the University and the community. It was not a performing body, but rather a group organized to sponsor, direct, and manage the activities of local music programs. Shortly thereafter the University decided to offer courses in theoretical music in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts, and Mr. Cady was invited to accept an instructorship; thus, he became Musical Director of the University Musical Society, Conductor of the Choral Union, Director of the School of Music, and Instructor in music in the University.

All of these activities continued to thrive for almost all the following decade. In 1888, however, interest lagged. Mr. Cady resigned, and President James B. Angell of the University, who was also a member of the Board of Directors of the University Musical Society, persuaded Albert A. Stanley, organist of Grace Church, Providence, Rhode Island, to come to Ann Arbor and head these activities. When Mr. Stanley left Providence the church choir and the church members presented him with a beautiful diamond ring, which he wore until his death in 1932, when Mrs. Stanley presented it to me as a memorial. I have worn it ever since.

Stanley carried on his musical activities with boundless enthusiasm. Upon the recommendation of President Angell, the name of the Ann Arbor School of Music was changed to the University School of Music. More important concerts were given, and the Choral Union attempted more serious and greater choral works. As a closing event in the concert series, each of the four seasons 1890 to 1893, the Boston Symphony Orchestra was heard in old University Hall. In 1894, the Board of Directors of the University Musical Society were disappointed and embarrassed because the plans of the Boston Symphony Orchestra would not permit its return to Ann Arbor. Therefore they engaged the Boston Festival Orchestra, under Emil Mollenhauer, a smaller but very excellent group, to come to Ann Arbor for three concerts; and they boldly announced it, not only as a "May Festival," but as the "First Annual May Festival." They inaugurated a tradition before the first event had even taken place!

1894 First May Festival

The announcement of the Festival was received with tremendous enthusiasm. Newspapers of the state gave much publicity to the event. Railroads granted special rates; and people poured into Ann Arbor from all directions. Few of them, however, took the precaution to purchase concert tickets in advance. The result was that the auditorium on the second floor of old University Hall, with a capacity of about 2200, was

filled to overflowing. Aisles, corridors, and the lobbies were packed. The fire hazard must have been tremendous. At the conclusion of the final concert, those from out of town rushed from University Hall, through a pouring rain, to the railroad station, where special trains were supposed to convey them east and west. Through some inadvertence, the special trains were at that moment still in the yards in Detroit. Eventually, about three a.m., the trains arrived. During the long wait the people grew impatient and hungry. Someone routed out a groceryman, and all had snacks of crackers, cheese, and bologna. Among those who attended the Festival were Shirley W. Smith and J. Raleigh Nelson. Being conscientious students, however, they made for home to avoid the rain, and missed all the fun at the station.

The next year the number of May Festival concerts was increased to four, later to five, and still later to six,- the number which has been continued for the past three or four decades. The erection of Hill Auditorium in 1913 opened these privileges to a possible audience of 5000, and the 1913 May Festival was the very first event to be staged there, actually a month before the formal opening of the building.

For the first eleven years, Emil Mollenhauer continued to bring the Boston Festival Orchestra to Ann Arbor, but in 1905 they disbanded, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, with Frederick Stock as conductor, was engaged instead. It continued to visit Ann Arbor for the Festival for the next thirty-one years, through 1935. Then the Philadelphia Orchestra took its place. Leopold Stokowski conducted the first year; since that time the Orchestra has been under the musical directorship of Eugene Ormandy.

In the meantime, the University Choral Union was increased to more than 300 members. The chorus has performed practically all of the great oratorios, operas in concert form, and many smaller choral works, at intervals through the years and at the May Festival concerts. Fifteen years ago the Musical Society expanded its activities by inaugurating an annual Chamber Music Festival. These concerts take place each year in February in Rackham Auditorium. During the first 20 or 25 years the chorus also gave performances of Handel's "Messiah," either in part or the entire work; and since that time it has been heard in annual performance in Hill Auditorium. For the past decade the annual "Messiah" performances have been so popular that two concerts have been required to satisfy the public.

<u>1940 School and Society separate</u> In 1929, the School of Music had become closely affiliated with the University, receiving partial financial support from it. In 1940, however, the Musical Society entirely relinquished control of the School of Music to the University, itself remaining an independent organization -- as it still is today.

<u>1904 Charles A. Sink</u> I first came to the University Musical Society in 1904, as Executive Secretary, and from 1927 to the present I have combined all secretarial duties with those of President. Thus, the Diamond Jubilee of the Society is also the Golden Jubilee of the author.

Human Interest Throughout these years I have had the privilege of meeting and knowing intimately most of the great musical artists of this country and many from foreign lands. The general opinion that all musicians are temperamentally disagreeable is an error, for during all of my activities I have never had a serious altercation with any artist or any manager. They are usually kind and gracious, but exceedingly sensitive. Little things which are of no consequence to the average person become important to them, because of their artistic nature. It has been the policy of the Musical Society always to make the artists feel at home, to assure them that they are among friends, and that anything and everything which they might desire to help make the performances artistically successful will be done. As a result, the artists seldom ask for anything unreasonable.

Paderewski Ignace Jan Paderewski came to Ann Arbor on his first tour to America in 1892. The Board of Directors announced a concert by this great artist, and stated that any profits made on the concert would be devoted to the construction of Barbour Gymnasium for women students, for which a campaign was in progress at that time. The profits amounted to about $128.00. Years later it was my pleasure to bring Mr. Paderewski to Ann Arbor on numerous occasions. On his last visit, Mrs. Sink and I invited him to our home for an after-concert supper party. He brought with him a little gift,- a beautiful book which had been given to him by Lord Northcliffe, the distinguished British statesman, more than thirty years before. This was to be an addition to our memorial library. He inscribed it to Mrs. Sink.

Mr. Paderewski did not notify us of his acceptance of our invitation until the day before the concert, when he wired from Chicago that he would accept with pleasure our invitation to "dinner" after the concert, and suggested that we limit our guests to not more than eight or ten. You will note that he said "dinner" in his wire, not supper party. Mrs. Sink consulted his travelling manager, whom we both knew, as to the menu. That evening he arrived at our house about 11 o'clock, and at midnight we sat down to dinner. At 1:30, his secretary sent a taxi to take him to his special car which was parked at the railroad station, but he dismissed the taxi-driver and told him to come back later. He did this two or three times, and it was nearly four o'clock in the morning when he left. He was in excellent spirits and entertained our dinner guests to the fullest. He complimented Mrs. Sink on the marvelous dinner and said that he had had everything that he liked, - that it was the best meal he had been served since he started on his tour. Maybe you would like to know what Mrs. Sink served. If my memory servs me right, we started with consommé, followed by a side dish of whitefish and parsleyed boiled potatoes; then a main course of fried chicken, with salad, pickles, jellies, etc., coffee, and for dessert just plain orange ice and cookies. It was a simple but substantial American meal, the sort which any American boy would relish, and it was gratifying that this great man could so thoroughly enjoy it, instead of desiring difficult delicacies.

Schumann-Heink Professor Stanley used to tell a story about Ernestine Schumann-Heink. On one of the early occasions when she sang in old University Hall, she was chatting in the artists' room with Dr. Stanley. She inquired as to how she would get onto the stage. Mr. Stanley pointed to some steps which led to a narrow little panelled door which opened onto the stage. She looked at the door, then at Dr. Stanley, then again at the door. She said, "How do I get through the door?" Mr. Stanley humorously replied that she could go through sideways. The great artist smiled and said "Mein Gott, I have no side-ways!"

On another occasion I myself was in the same artists' room when Mme. Schumann-Heink was again appearing. In the room with me was her newly acquired husband, Mr. William Rapp. It was always necessary to be very quiet in the artists' room because the partition was very thin and everything said could be heard by the audience. On this occasion, while all was quiet, our colored janitor, George Jewett, stepped into the room with a bundle of programs. Immediately, Mr. Rapp rose to his feet and glared at the man. They were poised like a couple of billy goats ready for an encounter; then both began to laugh loudly. It seems that years before, Jewett, who was a star player on the Michigan football team, had played against Rapp in a game in Chicago. They had not met since, but they immediately recognized each other. At the top of their voices they began to discuss football, fighting the game all over. I had all I could do to quiet them down and get them into another room.

de Pachmann Vladimir de Pachmann, the distinguished pianist, was somewhat eccentric. He had the unfortunate habit of coming to his concerts late and talking to the audience in a mumbling tone of voice for a considerable time before he would begin to play. On his last visit to Ann Arbor, when he was in his early eighties, I was much alarmed, because our concert patrons had heard about his peculiarities, and they were calling me up and asking if I could do something about it. It was a difficult assignment.

On the day of the concert he arrived in the morning. I persuaded his secretary-manager to bring him to the auditorium at 3:00 o'clock in order that he might get the feel of the building. He was reluctant to come and insisted that nobody be in the auditorium when he arrived. I satisfied him on this score. In the meantime, however, I secretly communicated his proposed presence to a number of students whom I could trust, and suggested that, if they would like to hear him rehearse, they could get into the auditorium early and "lose" themselves in the shadows in the rear. The news spread, and when I led the party in through the rear doors to the stage, I could see that there were 30 or 40 students at the rear of the auditorium. Led by the artist we gathered about the piano. He played a couple of measures, and then jumped up and said that he wouldn't be able to give the concert because the piano wasn't level. We moved it about a bit, and then he discovered that one leg of the piano was on the elevator lift, which he assumed was responsible for the trouble. I agreed with him and said that I would have the level of the lift changed. I called the janitor and the lift was jiggled up and down about a quarter of an inch. The artist put his foot on the crack, and I asked him to signal me when it was level -- which he did.

When I stamped on the floor the janitor tightened the mechanism and the lift came to a standstill. He looked it over carefully and tested it with his foot, and at last happily stated that the piano was now all right. I presume the difference in level was not greater than that of a sheet of paper. Then he began to play and to talk to us. Pretty soon students came drifting forward from the rear of the auditorium, and there was an audience of about thirty close down in front. He paid no attention, other than to turn toward them and explain to them the merits of the numbers he was performing. He was particularly interested in the compositions of Chopin,- so much so that by general consent he was nicknamed "The Chopinese." The students listened while he played for nearly an hour. At the conclusion I shooed all the students out the back door, locked the piano, put the key in my pocket in his presence, and told him that nobody would be allowed to touch the piano until he arrived that evening. When he arrived, I asked his secretary to go in and unlock the piano. Promptly at 8:30 that night, without hesitation and without conversation, he gave a marvelous recital.

Dr. Stanley used to enjoy telling a story about de Pachmann's first visit to Ann Arbor back in the gay nineties. On that occasion he was perturbed because the piano stool was not to his liking. At last Mr. Stanley succeeded in borrowing a bench from a fashionable home, and this seemed satisfactory except that it was too high. That evening just before the concert began, the artist persuaded the janitor to take a saw and shorten the legs about an inch and a half, because he was a rotund, pudgy man. This the janitor did, assuming that the stool belonged to the artist. Eventually the bench was returned to its owner, much to the chagrin and embarrassment of Stanley.

<u>Piatigorsky</u> A decade and a half ago, in the middle of the winter, Gregor Piatigorsky, the world-renouned cellist, was scheduled for a concert. He was to have arrived on the preceding Saturday morning, travelling from Florida. Mrs. Sink and I were at the station to greet him, but because of floods in the Ohio valley, his arrival was delayed, and he arrived in the evening and taxied to the Michigan Union. From there he called me at my residence. I asked him if there was anybody in his party by the name of de Rothschild, as the Michigan Union had been inquiring because of numerous calls from Paris, France, for Jacqueline de Rothschild, and the Union thought she might possibly be attached to the cellist's party. He said, "Oh, yes, she is here now." I explained that Paris, France, had been trying to reach her. He replied that she had already talked with Paris several times. Early Monday morning, Mr. Piatigorsky asked me to make an appointment with a reputable lawyer as he had some business he wanted to transact. I made an appointment for him with Roscoe O. Bonisteel, not knowing in the least what was involved. That night just before the concert Mr. Bonisteel called me and facetiously chided me for not knowing what was taking place. He said "Those people you sent down to me want to get married, and I have been working all day to overcome the legal restrictions involved." Piatigorsky was a Russian, at that time a man without a country. The lady was a French citizen. In France, bans have to be published for a certain period, while in Michigan, five days must elapse between the license and the ceremony. The couple was anxious to make absolutely certain that the marriage could not be invalidated by any

technical complications. After numerous long-distance calls to Chicago and New York with French consular authorities, and with local authorities, about a waiver of the license period, Mr. Bonisteel clarified the matter. The young lady had been in this country for a couple of months, and Piatigorsky had come from Europe only two weeks previously, and they met by appointment in Ann Arbor.

Backstage at intermission time, Mrs. Sink and I talked the situation over with the couple. We asked where they were going to be married, and Piatigorsky said he presumed it would be the City Hall. Mrs. Sink said, "No such thing -- you will be married in our home." This was agreed to. Then we conducted Miss de Rothschild back to our seats in the auditorium and the artist continued the program. Then Mrs. Sink got busy on the telephone, routed out a florist and a caterer, and in the morning things began "popping" around our house. The living room was banked with flowers. At ten o'clock, County Clerk Jay G. Pray (late Judge of Probate) appeared with many documents and seals, and Mr. Bonisteel also appeared. Piatigorsky asked, "Who is this lawyer, he seems to be a very important man." I said, "Yes, he is a very important man; he is President of the Michigan Bar Association with a membership of 38,000 (I didn't really know, but made a wild guess at the figure)." He looked pleased; and then he asked "Who is going to marry us?" I said the Honorable J. H. Payne, Ann Arbor's Justice of the Peace. He said that was fine, and said he must be an important man, too. I agreed. Then he asked me a question which was a poser, "Will the Justice wear a robe?" I explained that in America the practice of wearing robes was not as customary as it was in Europe, particularly in private homes. His countenance dropped. Mrs. Sink, always helpful in an emergency, called me aside and suggested that we ask Judge Payne to wear my academic gown. A little later when Judge Payne arrived, Piatigorsky inquired, "Who is that, and why is he going upstairs?" Mrs. Sink replied, "That's the Justice, and he is going upstairs to robe himself." This made everybody happy except the Judge and me. I explained to him the importance of wearing my academic robe. He said that he wouldn't mind wearing it, except that Bonisteel would make him laugh. I took Bonisteel aside and cautioned him. A little later all was in order and the party assembled before the bank of flowers, and "the knot was duly tied." At noon the wedding breakfast was served (I have never known why a meal served at twelve o'clock noon should be called "breakfast").

At two o'clock the party left for Philadelphia, where Mr. Piatigorsky had a concert the next day. We had all been sworn to keep the ceremony a deep dark secret, because the bride did not want her people in France to hear about the wedding until she had an opportunity to talk to them on the telephone. A few days later a reporter found out about the huge transatlantic telephone bills between the Michigan Union and Paris. Following this clue, he dug up the information about the ceremony, at the County Clerk's office; and then we were obliged to admit all. Everything came out happily because sufficient time had elapsed for the bride to inform her family. It has been a happy marriage. A son and daughter are now in school, and whenever we see the couple we always chat about the secret ceremony.

Tribute In closing, I wish to pay high tribute to the various Boards of Directors of the University Musical Society with whom I have served for half a century. These include G. Frank Allmendinger, Ottmar Eberbach, Levi D. Wines, Durand W. Springer, President James B. Angell, Harry B. Hutchins, Marion LeRoy Burton, Clarence Cook Little, Alexander G. Ruthven, Harlan Hatcher. Special appreciation is due to all of the artists and musical organizations who have been heard here through the years, to the managers, national and international, who have cooperated so graciously; to the press of Ann Arbor and the country generally, to the students and faculty members of the University, to the citizens of Michigan, and particularly to the large audiences which have loyally attended the concerts. Without sympathetic, intelligent, and loyal audiences, no series of concerts can succeed.

The legend of the Society, suggested by the distinguished Latin scholar, Henry Simmons Frieze, will always express its reason for being:

"A R S L O N G A V I T A B R E V I S"

Ann Arbor, Michigan
March 15, 1954

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More unconscious humor from the 1881 History of Washtenaw County:

"Too much praise cannot be given to such fine women, for if they receive not a share of this enviable meed they will vanish out of sight and a nondescript race will succeed them worth nothing."

"After his marriage he moved to different points in the state of New York."

"The angel of death once more laid his cold and clammy hand on the wife of his bosom."

"When about 20 years old he had a cousin about the same age who was all for living without hard work. He called Mr. S. a fool for working so hard. The cousin died in Detroit penniless. Mr. S., now 84 years old, acquired 360 acres of land, thus showing his better course of work over idleness."

"They joined in matrimony in the ordinary fashion."

"A pioneer minister, a man of large physical nature."